MAGA favourite Greene resigns after falling out with Trump

WASHINGTON: Saying she refused to be a 'battered wife', US Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene announced on Friday she was resigning from the House of Representatives in the wake of a dramatic falling out with President Donald Trump.

Her exit marks a stunning turn of events that few would have imagined months ago. Greene, a Republican from Georgia, was once one of Trump's closest allies and an outspoken advocate of his "America first" agenda, but the rift between the two widened in recent months over the release of government files related to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and other matters.

The public dispute between Trump and Greene had fuelled concerns among some Republicans that Trump's "Make America Great Again (MAGA)" base could fracture a year before the mid-terms, when Democrats hope to regain control of Congress.

In a 10-minute video posted on social media, Greene said she was spurred to resign by the prospect of having to face a Trump-backed Republican primary challenger and the potential takeover of the House by Democrats in next year's mid-term elections. She also complained that Congress has largely been "sidelined" since Trump returned to the presidency in January.

Self-respect and dignity

"I have too much self-respect and dignity, love my family way too much, and do not want my sweet district to have to endure a hurtful and hateful primary against me by the president we all fought for, only to fight and win my election while Republicans will likely lose the mid-terms," Greene said.

"I refuse to be a battered wife hoping it all goes away and gets better," she added.

'Great news'

Interviewed by *ABC News*, Trump said Greene's resignation, to take effect on Jan 5, was "great news for the country. It's great".

Greene lamented the state of American politics, contending that neither Republicans nor Democratic lawmakers were working to solve the nation's problems, including the rising cost of living.

She said voters were tuning out Washington because "they know how much credit card debt they have, they know how much their own bills have gone up over the past five years, they actually do their own grocery shopping and know food costs too much, their rent has increasingly gone up, they have been outbid by corporate asset managers too many times when they put in an offer to buy a house".

Greene's resignation will narrow the Republican majority in the House to 218 members over the Democrats' 213. Republicans have a 53-47 majority in the Senate.

Greene had been increasingly exhibiting her independence from Trump, joining a House effort to force the release of Epstein files over his objections, blasting House leadership for not doing more to address healthcare costs during the recent government shutdown and calling Israel's assault on Gaza a genocide. Trump, in turn, became more critical of her.—Reuters

NHA TRANG: People wade through floodwaters in Vietnam's flood-hit province of Khanh Hoa. Rescuers raced to find more than 20 people still missing after heavy rains claimed 55 lives across the country this week.—AFP

Trump aides' meeting with Russian official raises eyebrows

WASHINGTON: Officials and lawmakers in Washington are increasingly concerned about a meeting last month in which representatives of the Trump administration met Kirill Dmitriev, a Russian envoy who is under US sanctions, to draft a plan to end the war in Ukraine, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The meeting took place in Miami at the end of last month and included special envoy Steve Witkoff, President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and Dmitriev, who leads the Direct Investment Fund (DIF), one of Russia's largest sovereign wealth funds.

A close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Dmitriev has taken a leading role in talks with the US about the war and has met Witkoff several times this year. The Trump administration has issued a special waiver to allow his entry, one senior US official said.

Dmitriev and his fund were blacklisted by the US government in 2022 following Russias full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The sanctions effectively bar American citizens and companies from dealing with them.

The meeting resulted in a 28-point plan for ending the war. The plan, which was made public earlier this week by Axios, came as a surprise to US officials in various corners of the administration and has stirred confusion at embassies throughout Washington and in European capitals.

It has also prompted criticism from the Ukrainians and their allies for appearing heavily tilted toward Russian interests, with President Volodymyr Zelensky vowing that he would not betray Ukraine's interests.

Major concessions to Russia

The document, which calls for major concessions from Ukraine, appears to run counter to the tougher stance the Trump administration has lately taken toward Moscow, including with sanctions on its energy sector.

It's unclear whether Dmitriev came to the meeting in Miami with certain Russian demands and whether those were incorporated into the peace plan.

Two people familiar with the meeting said Rustem Umerov, Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, was also in Miami this week to discuss the plan with Witkoff.

Witkoff told Umerov about the plan during that visit and that the United States gave the plan to Ukraine via the Turkish government on Wednesday, before directly presenting it in Kyiv on Thursday.

Umerov has described his role as "technical" and denied that he discussed the plan in substance with US officials.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said in a statement that any peace plan "must offer security guarantees and deterrence for Ukraine, Europe and Russia" and offer economic incentives to both Ukraine and Russia.

"This plan was crafted to reflect the realities of the situation, and to find the best win-win scenario, where both parties gain more than they must give," she said.

Trump said on Friday that he expected Zelensky to sign onto the plan by the Thanksgiving holiday. The US has warned Ukraine it could curb military assistance if it does not sign.

In an evening address on Friday night, Zelensky announced talks with Ukraine's partners on steps to end the war.

"Our representatives know how to protect Ukraine's national interests and what exactly is needed to prevent Russia from carrying out a third invasion, another blow to Ukraine," he said.

Caught off guard

Many senior officials inside the State Department and on the National Security Council were not briefed about the plan. Special Envoy for Ukraine Keith Kellogg, who had been working with the Ukrainians on negotiating an end to the war and plans to step down in January, also was cut out of the talks led by Witkoff and Dmitriev.

One US official said Secretary of State Marco Rubio was read in on the 28-point plan, but didn't clarify when he was briefed.

Secretary Rubio has been closely involved throughout the entire process of developing a plan to end the war in Ukraine.

Witkoff, Kushner shun consultation

The situation has sparked worries inside the administration and on Capitol Hill that Witkoff and Kushner skirted the inter-agency process and that the discussions with Dmitriev have resulted in a plan that favours Russian interests.

It includes demands that Russia has previously made that Ukraine give up some of its territory in the eastern part of the country that it still controls, recognise Crimea as Russian and pledge not to join NATO.

"This so-called peace plan has real problems, and I am highly skeptical it will achieve peace," said Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Ukraine should not be forced to give up its lands to one of the world's most flagrant war criminals in Vladimir Putin."

Experts also criticised the proposed deal.

"Putin said today the plan he saw is a 'basis' for a future agreement likely a signal they plan on asking for inclusions and revisions on top of what is already a disadvantageous proposal for Kyiv, said Dara Massicot of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

One week seems ambitious for resolution.—Reuters

Thousands rally in France after murder linked to anti-drug activism

MARSEILLE: Thousands of people gathered in Marseille on Saturday to honour the brother of an anti-drug activist murdered in France's second largest city whose death sparked nationwide calls to confront drug crime.

Demonstrators chanted "Justice for Mehdi" before observing a minute of silence at the roundabout where the 20-year-old Mehdi Kessaci was shot dead by a gunman in his parked car on Nov 13.

Investigations are ongoing, but authorities consider the murder to be a "warning crime" linked to the anti-drug activism of his brother Amine Kessaci, 22, who was welcomed by cheers as he joined the crowd on Saturday.

Amine Kessaci is now living under police protection and the gathering was marked by heavy police presence in the southern port city hard hit by drug crime.

The young anti-drug and environmental activist threw himself into campaigning after his half-brother Brahim was murdered in a drug-trafficking feud in 2020.

"I demand justice for Mehdi. I demand justice for Brahim, my other murdered brother. I demand justice for all the victims. I demand safety for my family," said Amine, whose presence at the gathering wasn't confirmed until the last moment due to security concerns. A former lawmaker has called for him to be awarded France's highest order of merit, the Legion of Honor, but the activist said it was "the mothers of the neighbourhoods (hit by drug crime) who deserve a decoration for their courage, their dignity, their daily struggle".—AFP

Second human bird flu death recorded in US

WASHINGTON: A resident of Washington state died on Friday after contracting a rare strain of bird flu previously only reported in animals, the second human fatality linked to the virus in the United States this year.

The patient was only identified as "an older adult with underlying health conditions" and had been hospitalised since early this month, the Washington state department of health said on Friday.

Tests conducted by the University of Washington confirmed the patient was suffering from H5N5 avian influenza, the department said in a statement, calling it "the first recorded infection with this variant in a person globally."

The result was confirmed by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"The risk to the public remains low. No other people involved have tested positive for avian influenza," it said. "There is no evidence of transmission of this virus between people." The patient has "a backyard flock of mixed domestic birds," and officials believe this was the source of exposure.

The CDC has recorded more than 70 human cases of bird flu this year. A person died after contracting H5N1 in Louisiana in January.—AFP

Pakistan, EU stress need

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Arabian Sea remained central to Pakistan's national security, connectivity, economic resilience, food and energy security.

"From Karachi to Gwadar, our ports are gateways linking the landlocked heart of Central Asia to the global trading system. Pakistan, therefore, views maritime security and economic development as mutually reinforcing."

He pointed out that stronger cooperation in the maritime domain, as well as awareness, information sharing, and early warning, was needed to address challenges.

The deputy premier said Pakistan believed that a maritime domain that was secure, resilient and also sustainable could be collectively built through mutual trust, transparency, and adherence to international law.

"First, to ensure that oceans remain spaces for cooperation and shared prosperity, we must look away from exclusionary or hegemonic arrangements in the maritime domain," he elaborated.

"We must enhance cooperation under the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as well as regional and bilateral legal instruments and customary international law. It is imperative to ensure the harmonious and judicious use of ocean resources as a common heritage of mankind."

'Peaceful means'

Mr Dar stressed the need to resolve maritime disputes through peaceful means, in line with international law.

He further said that connectivity must be combined with resilience and critical infrastructure should be developed through diversification addressing redundancy mechanisms.

"We must align best practices so that disruption in one region does not cascade globally."

Third, he said maritime development must be anchored in international cooperation and technological solutions.

"Pakistan has strengthened its Joint Maritime Information Coordination Centre, integrating satellite-based monitoring and AI-enabled vessel tracking with the support of Suparco [Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission]. We look forward to enhancing cooperation with our partners in this regard," he added.

"Pakistan looks forward to deepening cooperation with the EU and partner countries in technology transfer, regulatory exchanges, and capacity-building for the protection of critical maritime infrastructure."

Western leaders say Ukraine plan needs more work

JOHANNESBURG: European and other Western leaders said on Saturday a US peace plan was a basis for talks to end Russia's war in Ukraine but needed "additional work", part of Western efforts to eke out a better deal for Kyiv before a Thursday (Nov 27) deadline.

Meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit, European and other Western leaders scrambled to come up with a coordinated response to US President Donald Trump's demand for Ukraine to accept his 28-point peace plan with Russia by Thursday.

Trump said in brief remarks later that his proposal was not his final offer, signalling potential room for adjustments as Ukraine and its European allies stressed that the plan could serve as a foundation for negotiations but required changes.

The European and other Western leaders agreed national security advisers from the E3 — France, Britain and Germany — would meet European Union, U.S. and Ukrainian officials in Geneva on Sunday for further discussions. Italy would also send an official, diplomatic sources said.

The US plan, which endorses key Russian demands, was met with measured criticism in many European capitals, with leaders trying to balance praise for Trump for trying to end the fighting with recognition that some of the terms in his proposal are unpalatable for Kyiv.—Reuters

FCC asked to return appeal

Continued from Page 1

establishing the court was contentious and under legal scrutiny. "The 27th Amendment is against the Constitution," the judges claimed, adding that an amendment could not be invoked to justify an action when its own validity was disputed.

The plea underscored that maintaining the appeal at the SC was the only legally sustainable option, particularly when the Amendment's compatibility with the Constitution has yet to be conclusively decided. The judges insisted that appellate matters concerning judicial transfers, administrative decisions, and constitutional interpretation must remain within the SC's exclusive domain until and unless the Amendment is upheld as lawful.

The case is scheduled for hearing before the FCC, but the newly filed miscellaneous petition by the IHC judges has placed the court in a position where it must first rule on the question of jurisdiction.

Trump's admiration for Mamdani dashes expectations of fireworks

NEW YORK: President Donald Trump hosted New York City's mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani at the White House on Friday for a meeting that took place without apparent conflict despite their radically different worldviews. Here are some takeaways from their closely watched encounter:

What was the biggest victory for Trump? He changed the subject by changing his rhetoric on Mamdani, who he previously blasted as a "100 per cent communist lunatic". "We agree on a lot more than I would have thought," the president said, his occasional scowl replaced with a wide smile as he praised Mamdani, referred to him as "Mr Mayor", and predicted success for his tenure leading New York.

Trump's warm welcome of Mamdani and their televised tete-a-tete in the Oval Office captivated political enthusiasts and moved the headlines into more positive territory for the president after weeks of politically damaging coverage of files related to the late Jeffrey Epstein, the convicted sex offender who was once a friend of Trump.

With Trump's poll numbers sinking and some of his policies failing to gain traction, shifting the focus to a different topic is just what Trump needed - and may be a reason for him not to turn on Mamdani again anytime soon.

Affordability agenda

Trump and Mamdani said they focused their private discussion on the cost of living and affordability, issues at the heart of Mamdani's mayoral victory. Trump talked at length about bringing down the price of groceries and housing.

"Some of his ideas are the same ideas I have," said Trump, who opined that some of his supporters voted for Mamdani.

A former real estate developer, Trump brightened at Mamdani's call for more housing in New York and Mamdani made a point of saying his campaign had reached out to Trump's base.

"When we spoke to those voters who voted for President Trump, we heard them speak of the cost of living," he said.

By emphasising pocketbook issues, the two men largely dodged topics of disagreement such as immigration policy and the Gaza conflict. But their economic focus also represented smart politics for Trump as polls show affordability remains the number one concern for voters nationwide.

The White House has indicated that the cost of living will be a top priority for Trump next year, ahead of the mid-term elections that will determine whether the president's Republican party retains control of Congress.

Holding his own

Mamdani, a Democrat, appeared comfortable and confident standing in the Oval Office. He spoke respectfully of Trump while sticking to the themes of his political campaign.

While the president praised him, Mamdani did not really praise the president, and he did not shy away from critical subjects, such as his views about Trump's immigration policies and how they impact New York.

Both answered questions, though Mamdani deferred to Trump to choose which journalists to acknowledge from the press pool, which included New York-focused and right-leaning reporters.

At one point, Trump weighed in to support Mamdani as the mayor-elect fielded a question about why he flew to Washington instead of taking a train.

"I'll stick up for you," Trump said, adding that a flight was the fastest way to get to the capital from New York City.

Body language

Warmth, familiarity, even fraternity. In what could have been a contentious meeting between political polar opposites, Trump and Mamdani exuded friendliness in their first get-together since the democratic socialist became New York City's mayor-elect after beating establishment party figures in the Democratic primary, notably former New York governor Andrew Cuomo.

Unlike aggressive meetings Trump has had with some foreign leaders in the same space, the president appeared calm, supportive and even enthusiastic about Mamdani as the two men appeared before cameras.

They displayed amiable body language. Trump shook Mamdani's hand more than once, patting it with his other in apparent affection, and touched or playfully punched his arm at other times, almost paternally, while they took questions together from the press.

Trump, appearing like an elder statesman, sat at his desk, while Mamdani, the younger upstart, stood next to him, his hands clasped. Trump wore a wide red power tie, Mamdani wore a narrower blue one, both colours corresponding to their respective political party affiliations.

Trump likes winners

Some expected fireworks between the volatile conservative president and the mayor-elect who reaffirmed his embrace of the democratic socialist label. Yet the aftermath of the meeting was surprisingly cordial. Trump suggested that Mamdani might change his mind about some policies. "I think he's going to surprise some conservative people," the president said.

Trump, who praised Mamdani's performance during the mayoral primaries and general election, has always liked winners.

Bringing Mamdani to the White House was not considerably different from inviting a championship sports team, a presidential tradition that Trump relishes.

And as a fellow New Yorker, Trump may have a level of respect for someone who successfully navigated the city's stormy politics. Being the mayor of New York City is a big deal, Trump said.

At times Trump acted as if he were meeting a fellow head of state. He remarked about the media attention the two had drawn, saying it exceeded the scrutiny attracted by some leaders of other countries.

Trump grew up in Queens, where Mamdani resides now, making him the city's first mayor from that borough.

It is possible both men saw themselves as somewhat kindred spirits. "I love New York City," the president said.—Reuters